

THE DRESS OF THE PERIOD.

The Circumference of a Woman's Waist— The Fashionable Shoe.

Fellows of the Royal Society in London have formed a new occupation; at least one of their number, Mr. Treves, has been lecturing at Kensington on "The Dress of the Period." Oscar Wilde told me when he was in Cincinnati that nobody lectured in England except broken down clergymen, who went about with a magic lantern and showed pictures of the Holy Land, which they said they had visited, and probably had not. Mr. Treves, F. R. C. S., may have taken a leaf out of Oscar's own book—at all events his lecture, as learned from the Queen, must have been no end of jolly, and drew such a crowd of men and women, Vicountesses, Duchesses, and my ladies, that numbers were turned from the doors, and the lecturer was requested to repeat his lecture a week later. The platform presented a curious and varied assortment of objects. By the side of a gaunt skeleton stood a cast of the nude Venus of Thorwaldsen, near which, suspended on a pole, was an olive green silk costume made in the latest fashion; a little way off a lay figure stood clad in a garment of soft, clinging pink silk draped in Greek fashion, over an underdress of creamy lace (quite intellectually utter); pinned against a screen were diagrams of enlarged fashion plates and slightly veiled female forms; on some of these the interior organs were represented in color. Sections of the figure showed these organs before and after the process of tight lacing, and frightened some of the dowagers present almost into fits. Then came a number of drawings of booted and naked feet, perfect and deformed. In the midst of these inspiring surroundings the lecturer was introduced by another eminent F. R. C. S., who declared that he considered dress an important subject, that it involved the fulfillment of a serious duty, that it encouraged the arts and gave pleasure to others. He did not add that as a matter of personal consolation it ranked next to religion, but what he did say put the ladies into a very approving frame of mind. As it is generally conceded that an epoch of tight lacing is coming on, Mr. Treves' remarks upon this subject are worth noting, though he could not add much to what has been said before. He declared he was depressed at approaching the subject, for he supposed that it was an incurable evil, and that if he were to lecture every day on the subject women would continue to "tight lace." Taking this depressed view, Mr. Treves showed comparative diagrams, exhibiting the liver, the stomach, in their normal state, and these unhappy organs disfigured and compressed out of their place by this fatal habit. Pointing to the Venus of Thorwaldsen, and to the fashionable hourglass shaped green silk costume on its stand, the normal waist, he said, founded on measurements taken from the statues of Venus in ancient and modern times, and from nobly developed living women ignorant of corsets, is from twenty-six inches to twenty-eight inches. The fashionable dressmaker's waist is from twenty inches to twenty-four inches, while a French book on beauty lays down that sixteen inches is the ideal waist every woman should strive to attain. This is exactly two inches less than the fashionable boarding school waist on this side the water. The normal waist is oval, the fashionable waist is round, therefore, on the score of *beauty*, a narrow waist is hideous, and on the score of *sense* the lecturer claimed it is on a par with the Chinese fashion of deforming the foot, or the Indian practice of flattening the head. On the score of health, he cited an array of appalling facts furnished by doctors and crownors of repute. One cheerful example was given of a woman who died of syncope, who was found to have so compressed her body by tight lacing that the stomach was, so to speak, divided into two portions, one being thrust upward so as to hamper the heart, while the other was pressed downward. Mr. Treves, in the slang of the period, sat down hard upon "stays," ~~declaring them quite unnecessary for girls~~, who up to seventeen or eighteen years should be practically waistless, but relented a little at the sight of the formless and void females before him, and said women inclined to stoutness might have a modified corset with a little stiffening in it. The lecturer shot his little shaft at the decorative movement by suggesting that we sacrifice to the cultus of fashion so imperious in its demand for some kind of deformity, one of a less serious character than that caused by tight lacing, suggesting the plastering up of one eye with some ornamental plaster of a Japanese design!

The fashionable shoe is the worst covering human ingenuity ever devised for the human foot, and has given rise to an ungraceful carriage, which has become a race characteristic of the fashionable European. The only thing in modern dress the learned fellow really approved is the "combination garment." The adaptation of Greek dress for evening wear (illustrated in the pink silk and lace) was pronounced to be simple, elegant, graceful, easy to make, realizing all the requirements of beautiful and reasonable dress. The reason for the non-success of those who profess to dress "sensibly" is that they disregard prettiness and becomingness, and seem to strive (successfully) to demonstrate that there is no step between fashionable attire and frumpishness. The Greek dress proves that grace and sense may both be followed in the designing of raiment.

If George Riddle and other of our clever Harvard men would come over to this alien region, and do Oedipus for us in the designing of raiment that recalls

The glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that

was Rome,

we believe the time is ripe for a genuine

Grecian boom, and a revival of the chiton

and the peplum.

Mankind in all civilized regions appears to rebel at the tyranny of the tailors. There appears to be what our Methodist friends call "an awakening" on the subject of clothes. In Paris there has just been founded a waistcoat dinner club. They meet at Voison's monthly, and each member wears an extraordinary waistcoat, in which he must not appear twice. One came crimson breasted, one gold, one sea blue, with ships of all shapes, cut out in white upon it in very shipshape fashion, and one was in yellow, studded with fencing foils. This shows the necessity of some outlet for man's desire for finery.

Prince Leopold is going to have a span new tartan when he marries, in which to disport himself among the cedars and rhododendrons that are the boast of Claremont, his official residence. He has instructed Mr. Alex. Ross, of Glasgow, to compile him a new tartan, the like of which was never before seen. Mr. Eastman Johnson, artist and critic, will neither picture nor approve women who wear their hair in water waves. In England a society has been formed for the distribution of Ruskin's works among the masses.

Decidedly the mysterious tyranny of fashion is exciting the attention of minds calculated to restrain its more insane departures, and put the dress of the period, which is a part of every day life and day concern, in its proper relations to the laws of health and beauty.

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